MARVEL COMICS
THE DEATH OF VERMIN PART 1
the SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN
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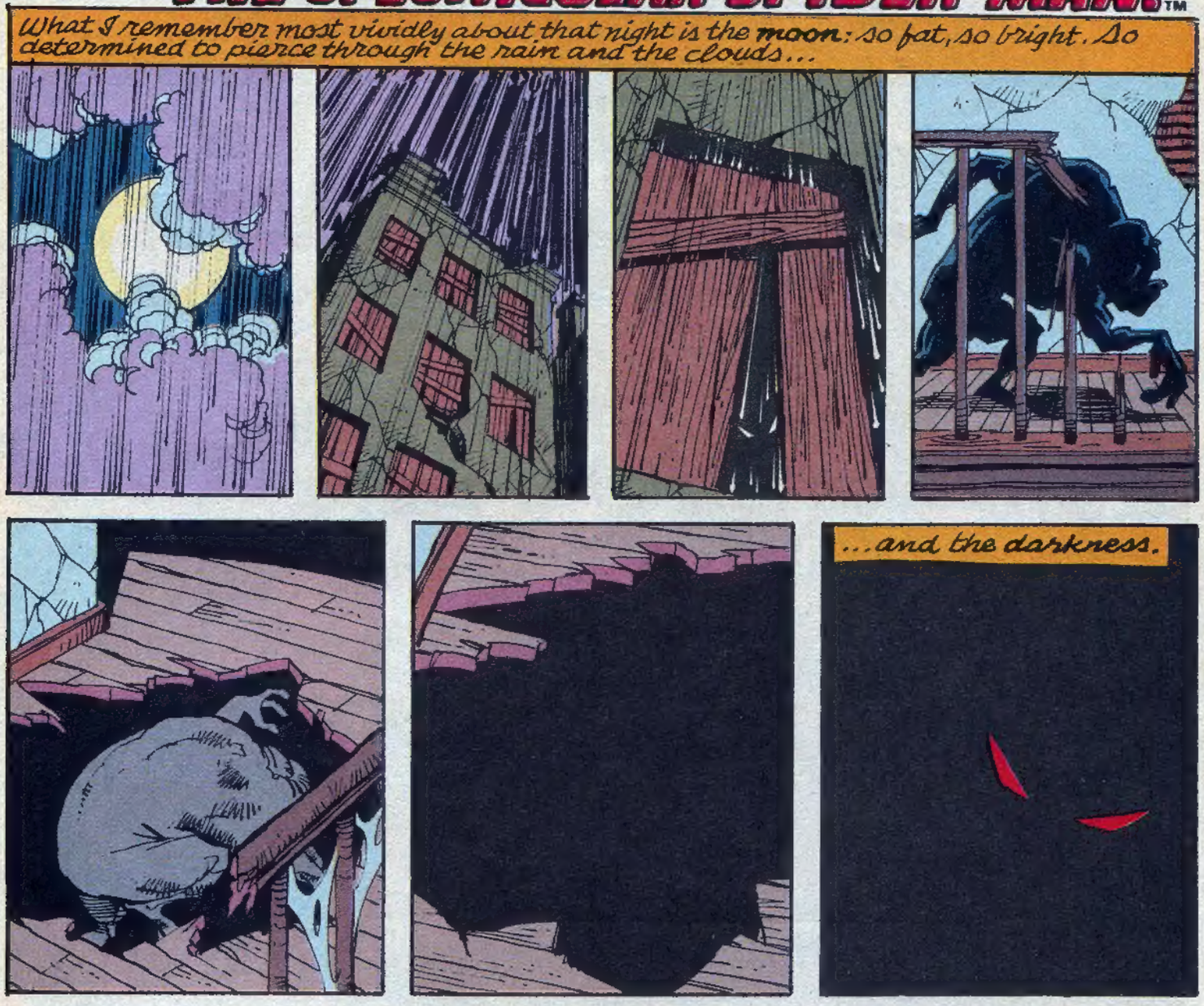
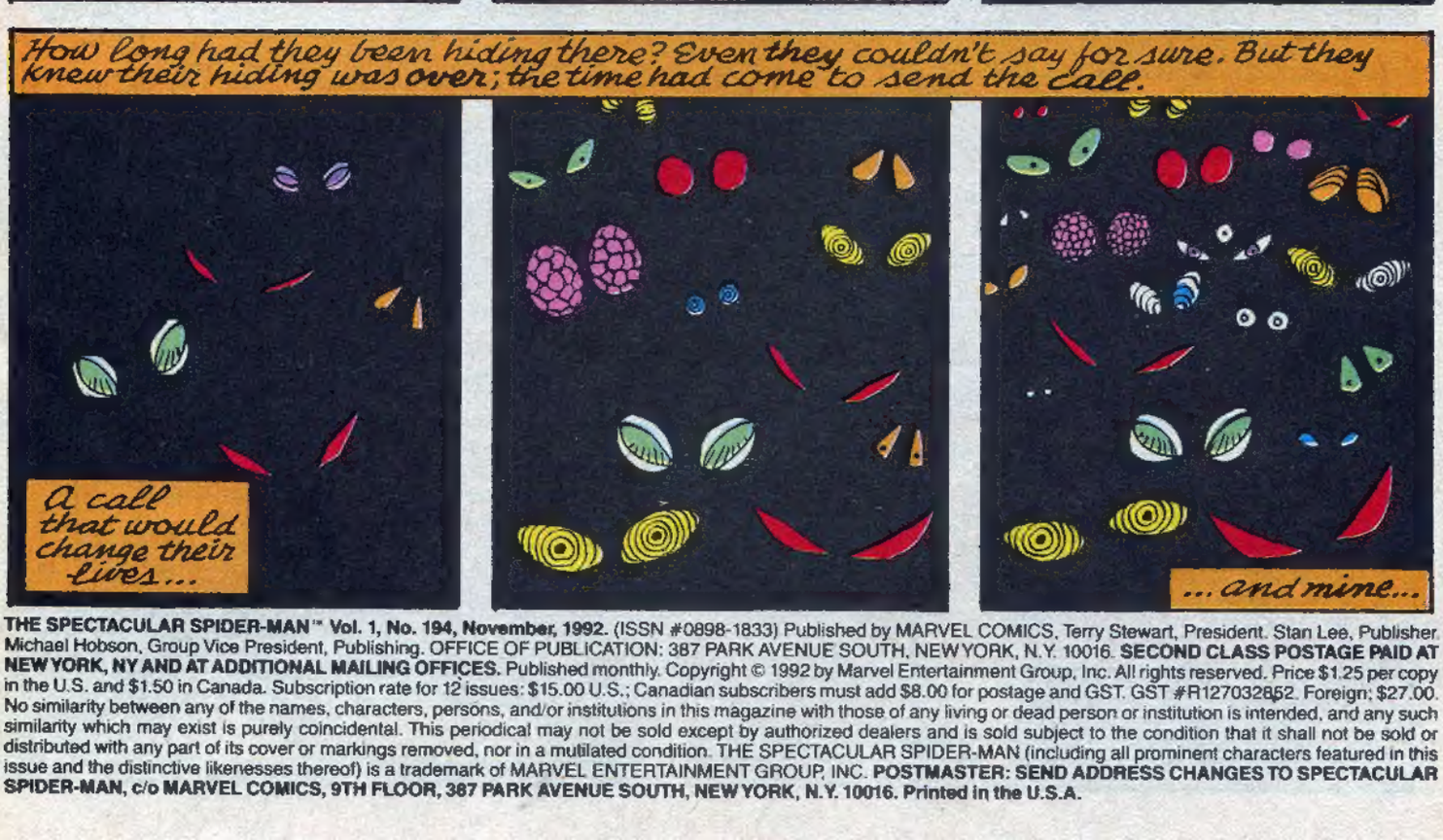
30TH ANNIVERSARY
1962 1992
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
Sal Buscema

BITTEN BY A RADIOACTIVE SPIDER, STUDENT PETER PARKER GAINED THE PROPORTIONATE STRENGTH AND AGILITY OF AN ARACHNID! ARMED WITH HIS WONDROUS WEB-SHOOTERS, THE RELUCTANT SUPER HERO STRUGGLES WITH SINISTER SUPER-VILLAINS, MAKING ENDS MEET, AND MAINTAINING SOME SEMBLANCE OF A NORMAL LIFE!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN!™


What I remember most vividly about that night is the moon: so fat, so bright. So determined to pierce through the rain and the clouds...
...and the darkness.


How long had they been hiding there? Even they couldn't say for sure. But they knew their hiding was over; the time had come to send the call.
A call that would change their lives...
...and mine...

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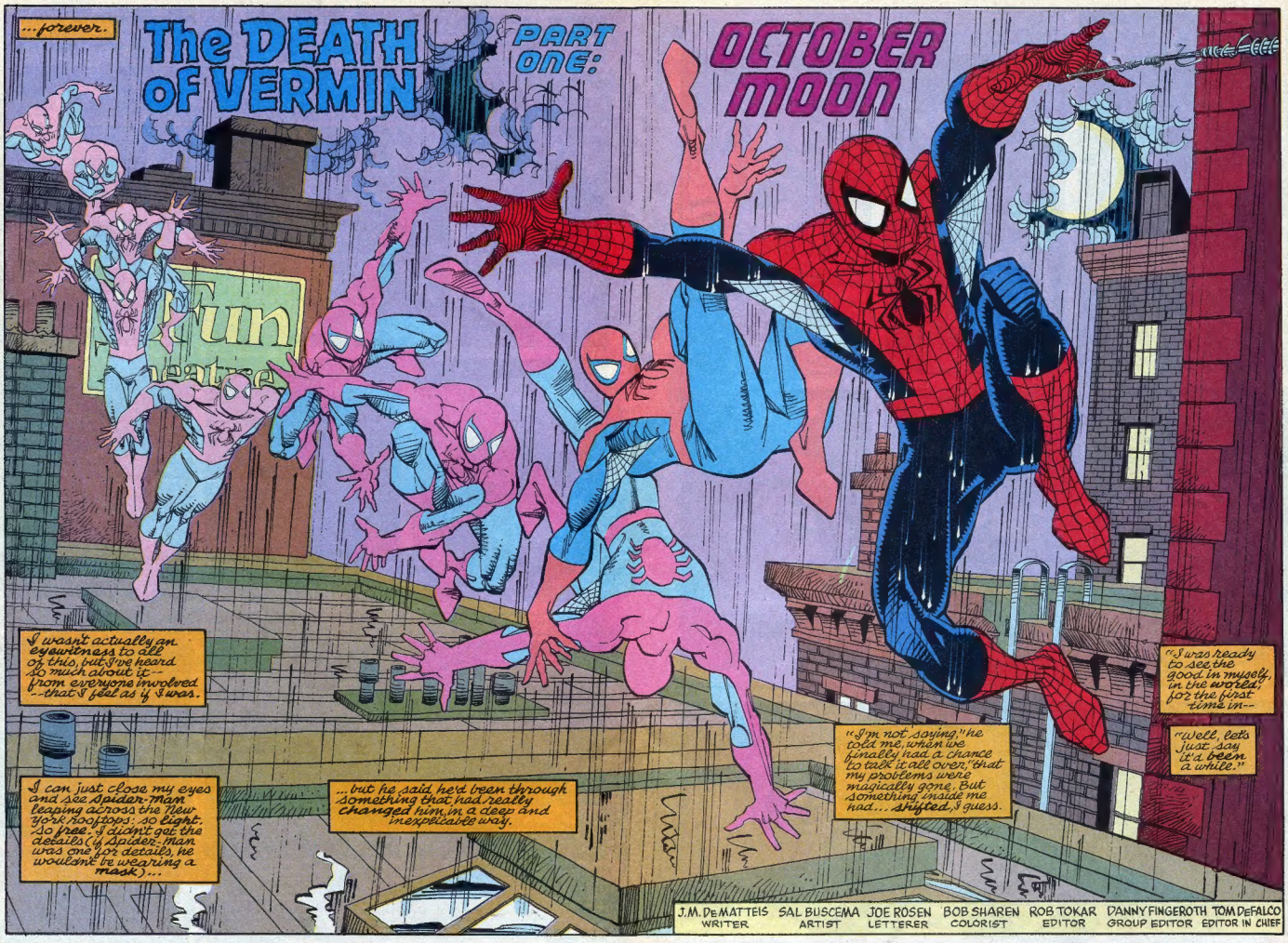
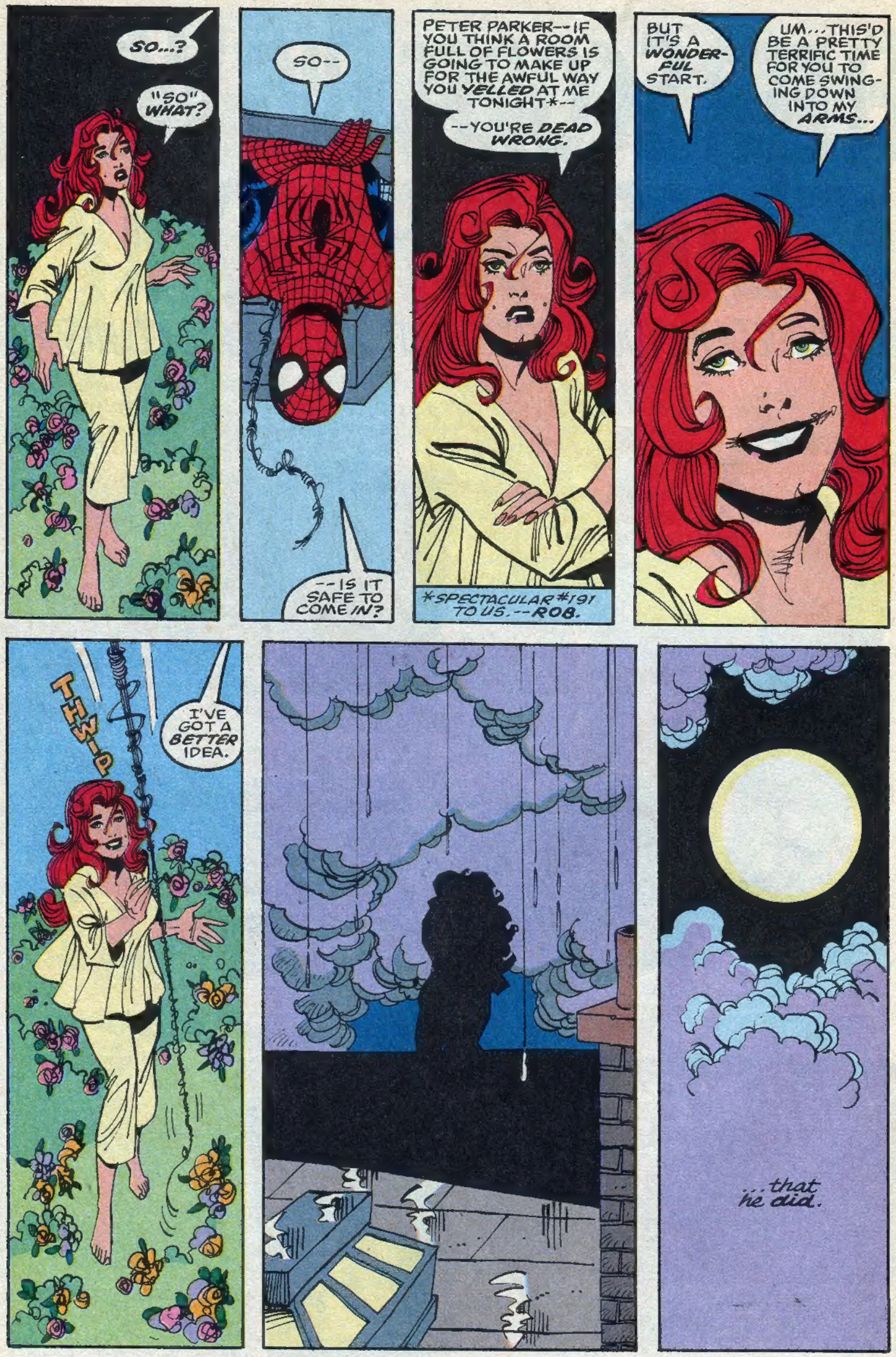
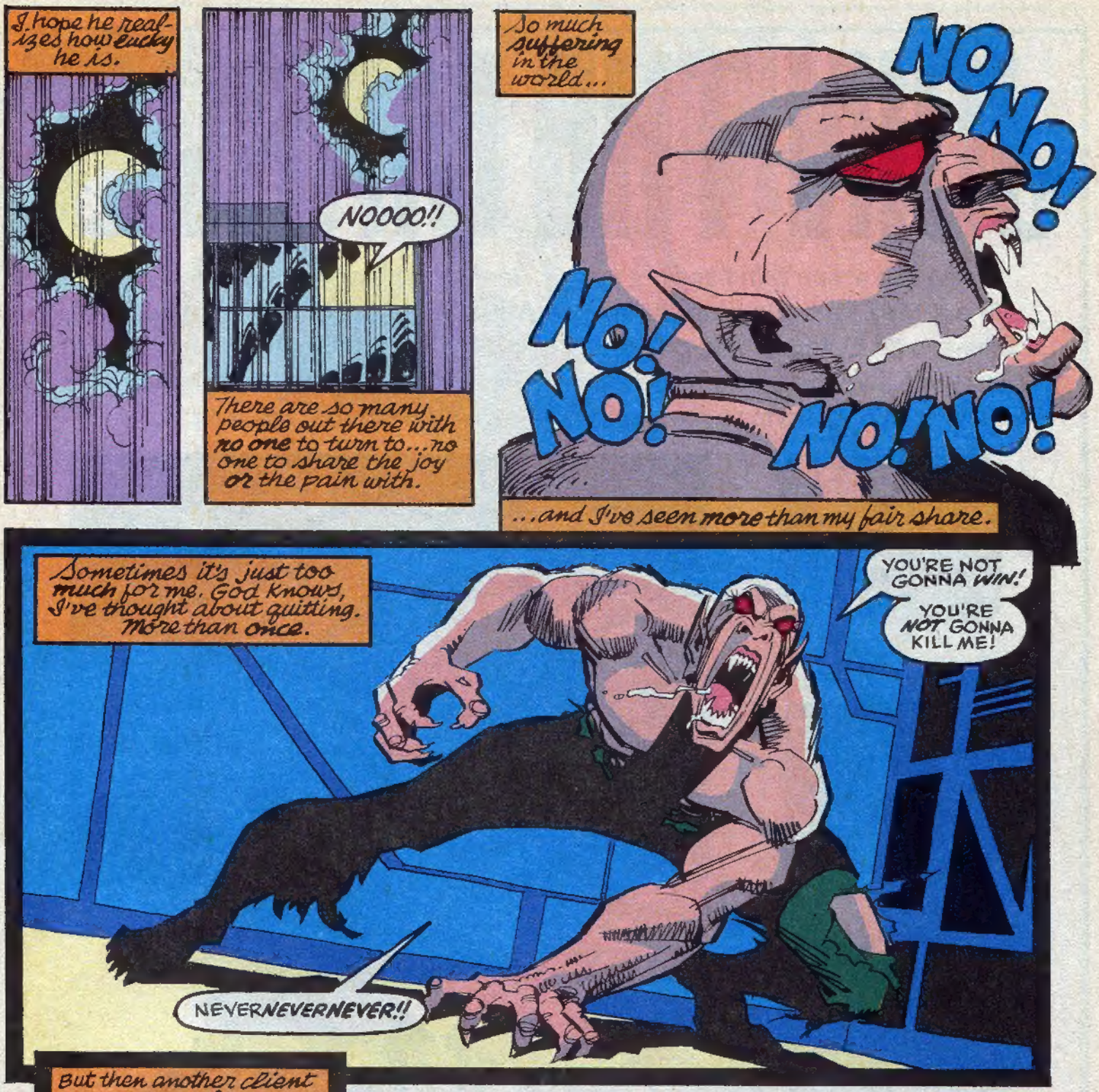

...forever.
The DEATH of VERMIN
PART ONE:
OCTOBER MOON
I wasn't actually an eyewitness to all of this, but I've heard so much about it--from everyone involved--that I feel as if I was.
I can just close my eyes and see Spider-Man leaping across the New York rooftops--so light. So free. I don't get the details (if Spider-Man was one for details, he wouldn't be wearing a mask)...
...but he said he'd been through something that had really changed him in a deep and inexplicable way.
"I'm not saying," he told me, when we finally had a chance to talk it all over, "that my problems were magically gone. But something inside me had... shifted, I guess.
"I was ready to see the good in myself, in the world, for the first time in--
"Well, let's just say it'd been a while."
J.M. DeMATTEIS WRITER
SAL BUSCEMA ARTIST
JOE ROSEN LETTERER
BOB SHAREN COLORIST
ROB TOKAR EDITOR
DANNY FINGEROTH GROUP EDITOR
TOM DeFALCO EDITOR IN CHIEF

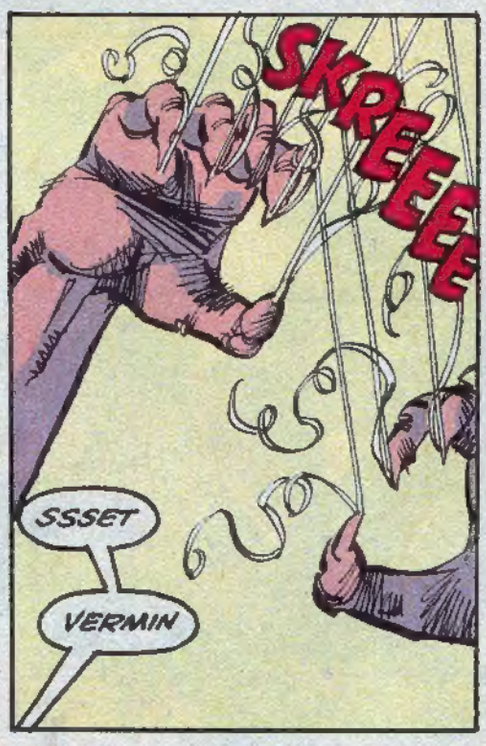
"But that night," he continued, "life seemed ...precious. Blessed.
"Really worth living."
Those moments of clarity, of connectedness, are all-too rare for most of us.
I just hope he had someone special to share it with.
KREEEK
PETER...?
PETER-- IS THAT--
--YOU...?
I'm pretty good at reading people--that's what they pay me for, after all--and I got the distinct impression...


SO...?
"SO" WHAT?
SO--
--IS IT SAFE TO COME IN?
PETER PARKER--IF YOU THINK A ROOM FULL OF FLOWERS IS GOING TO MAKE UP FOR THE AWFUL WAY YOU YELLED AT ME TONIGHT*--
--YOU'RE DEAD WRONG.
*SPECTACULAR #191 TO US.--ROB.
BUT IT'S A WONDER-FUL START.
UM...THIS'D BE A PRETTY TERRIFIC TIME FOR YOU TO COME SWING-ING DOWN INTO MY ARMS...
THWIP
I'VE GOT A BETTER IDEA.
...that he did.


I hope he realizes how lucky he is.
NOOOO!!
There are so many people out there with no one to turn to... no one to share the joy or the pain with.
So much suffering in the world...
NO NO!
NO! NO! NO! NO!
...and I've seen more than my fair share.

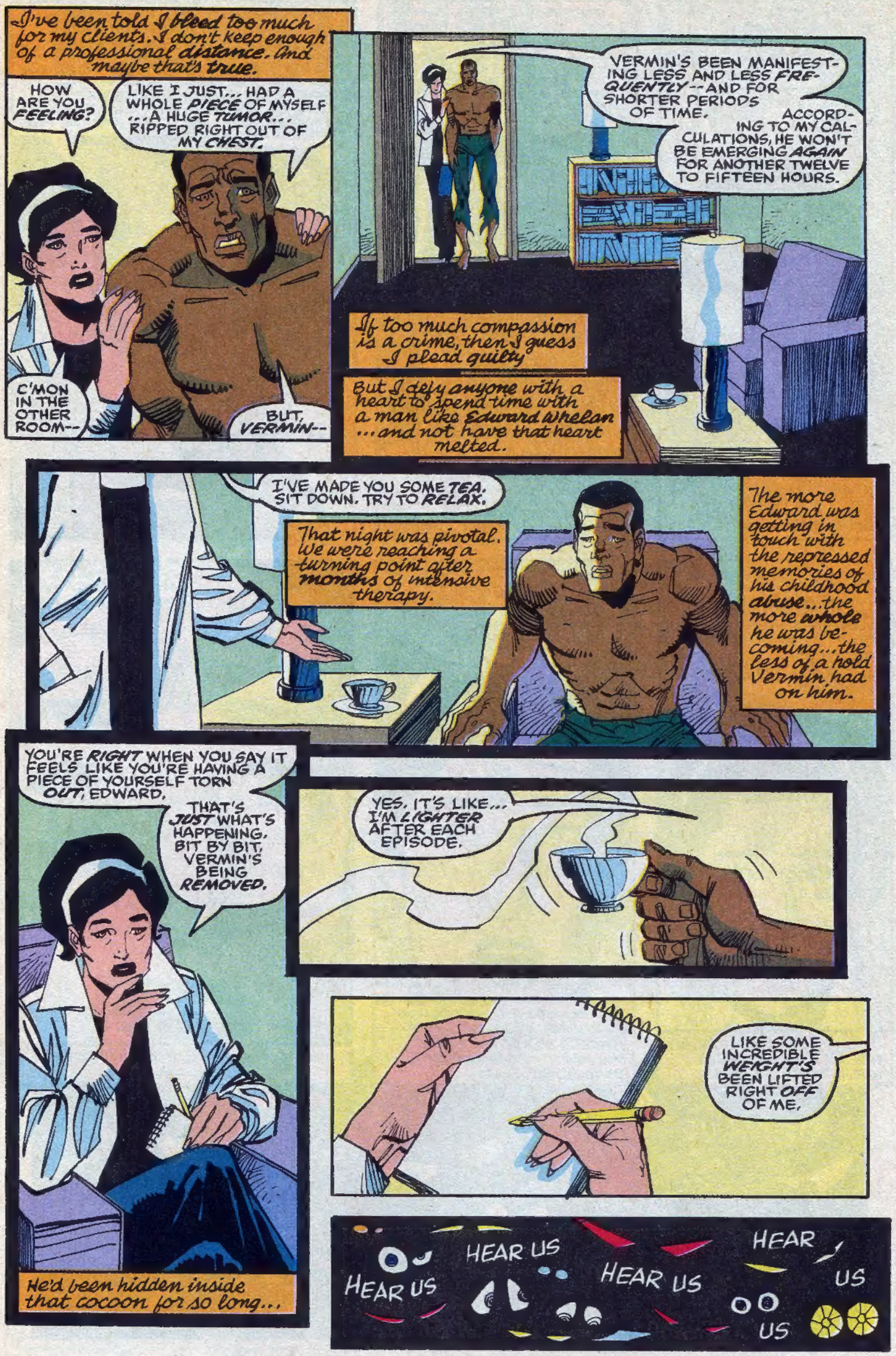
Sometimes it's just too much for me. God knows, I've thought about quitting. More than once.
YOU'RE NOT GONNA WIN!
YOU'RE NOT GONNA KILL ME!
NEVERNEVERNEVER!!

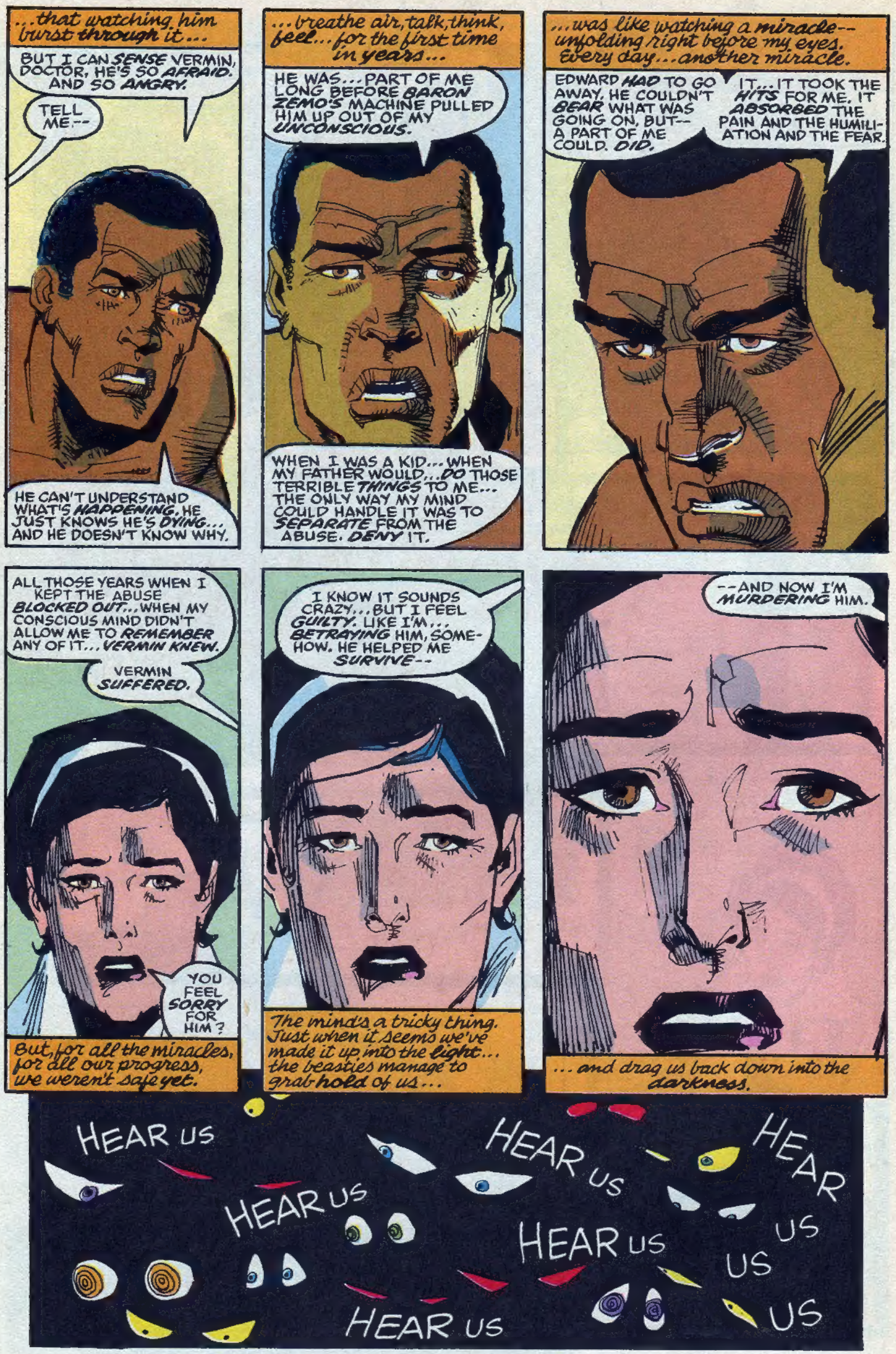
But then another client comes along...
LET ME OUT!
...another tortured heart, another lost soul...

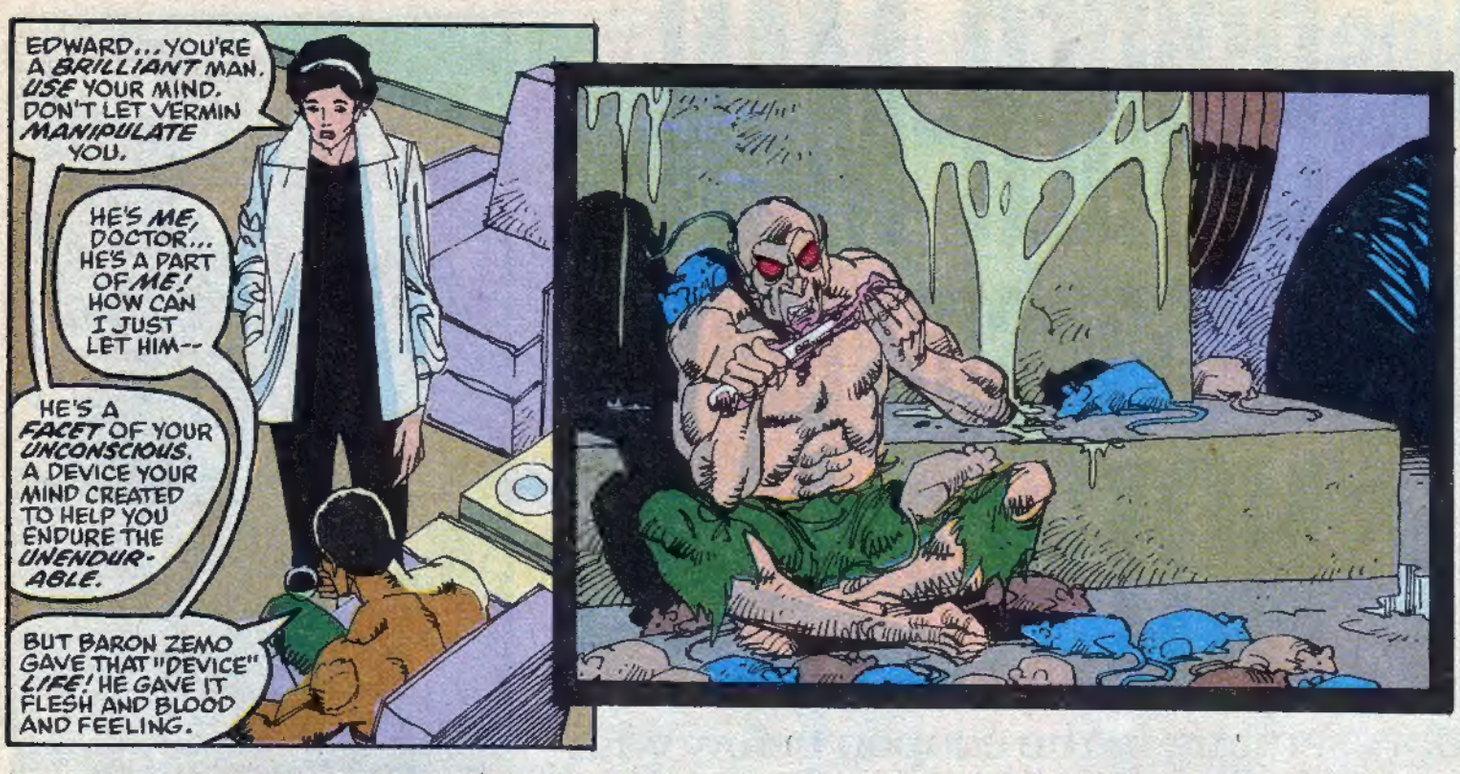

SKREEEE
SSSET
VERMIN

FREE!
SHRAAK
...and what can I do?

What I always do.
DON'T WANNA DIE!
RAKKK!
DON'TDON'TDON'T DON'TDON'T!
NOT FAIR!
I KEPT HIM ALIVE!
TOOOM!
I KEPT HIM SSSAFE!
I KEPT--
--KEPT HIM--
...KEPT...
Help.
EDWARD...?
D-DOCTOR--
--KAFKA...?


I've been told I bleed too much for my clients. I don't keep enough of a professional distance. And maybe that's true.
HOW ARE YOU FEELING?
LIKE I JUST... HAD A WHOLE PIECE OF MYSELF ...A HUGE TUMOR... RIPPED RIGHT OUT OF MY CHEST.
C'MON IN THE OTHER ROOM--
BUT, VERMIN--
VERMIN'S BEEN MANIFESTING LESS AND LESS FREQUENTLY--AND FOR SHORTER PERIODS OF TIME.
ACCORDING TO MY CALCULATIONS, HE WON'T BE EMERGING AGAIN FOR ANOTHER TWELVE TO FIFTEEN HOURS.
If too much compassion is a crime, then I guess I plead guilty
But I defy anyone with a heart to spend time with a man like Edward Whelan ...and not have that heart melted.
I'VE MADE YOU SOME TEA. SIT DOWN. TRY TO RELAX.
That night was pivotal. We were reaching a turning point after months of intensive therapy.
The more Edward was getting in touch with the repressed memories of his childhood abuse...the more whole he was becoming...the less of a hold Vermin had on him.
YOU'RE RIGHT WHEN YOU SAY IT FEELS LIKE YOU'RE HAVING A PIECE OF YOURSELF TORN OUT, EDWARD.
THAT'S JUST WHAT'S HAPPENING. BIT BY BIT, VERMIN'S BEING REMOVED.
He'd been hidden inside that cocoon for so long...
YES. IT'S LIKE... I'M LIGHTER AFTER EACH EPISODE.
LIKE SOME INCREDIBLE WEIGHT'S BEEN LIFTED RIGHT OFF OF ME.
HEAR US
HEAR US
HEAR US
HEAR US
US

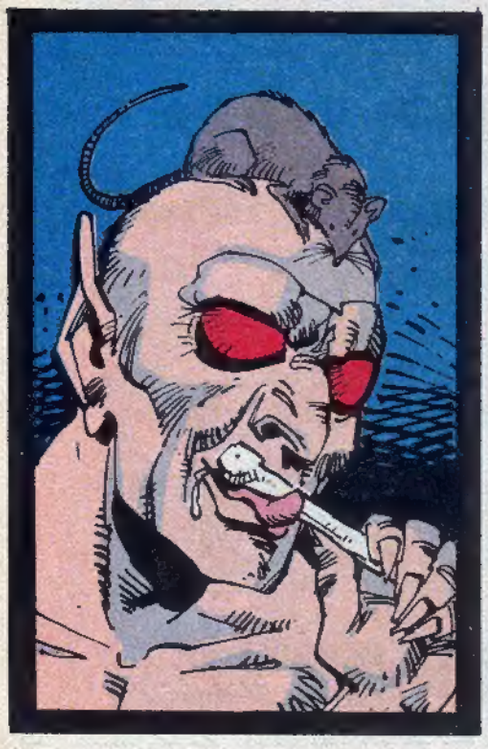

...that watching him burst through it...
BUT I CAN SENSE VERMIN, DOCTOR, HE'S SO AFRAID. AND SO ANGRY.
TELL ME--
HE CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HAPPENING. HE JUST KNOWS HE'S DYING... AND HE DOESN'T KNOW WHY.
...breathe air, talk, think, feel... for the first time in years...
HE WAS... PART OF ME LONG BEFORE BARON ZEMO'S MACHINE PULLED HIM UP OUT OF MY UNCONSCIOUS.
WHEN I WAS A KID... WHEN MY FATHER WOULD... DO THOSE TERRIBLE THINGS TO ME... THE ONLY WAY MY MIND COULD HANDLE IT WAS TO SEPARATE FROM THE ABUSE. DENY IT.
...was like watching a miracle-- unfolding right before my eyes. Every day... another miracle.
EDWARD HAD TO GO AWAY. HE COULDN'T BEAR WHAT WAS GOING ON, BUT-- A PART OF ME COULD. DID.
IT... IT TOOK THE HITS FOR ME. IT ABSORBED THE PAIN AND THE HUMILIATION AND THE FEAR.
ALL THOSE YEARS WHEN I KEPT THE ABUSE BLOCKED OUT... WHEN MY CONSCIOUS MIND DIDN'T ALLOW ME TO REMEMBER ANY OF IT... VERMIN KNEW.
VERMIN SUFFERED.
YOU FEEL SORRY FOR HIM?
But, for all the miracles, for all our progress, we weren't safe yet.
I KNOW IT SOUNDS CRAZY... BUT I FEEL GUILTY. LIKE I'M... BETRAYING HIM, SOMEHOW. HE HELPED ME SURVIVE--
The mind's a tricky thing. Just when it seems we've made it up into the light... the beasties manage to grab hold of us...
--AND NOW I'M MURDERING HIM.
... and drag us back down into the darkness.
HEAR US
HEAR US
HEAR US
HEAR US
HEAR US
HEAR US
HEAR US
US
US


EDWARD... YOU'RE A BRILLIANT MAN. USE YOUR MIND. DON'T LET VERMIN MANIPULATE YOU.
HE'S ME, DOCTOR... HE'S A PART OF ME! HOW CAN I JUST LET HIM--
HE'S A FACET OF YOUR UNCONSCIOUS. A DEVICE YOUR MIND CREATED TO HELP YOU ENDURE THE UNENDURABLE.
BUT BARON ZEMO GAVE THAT "DEVICE" LIFE! HE GAVE IT FLESH AND BLOOD AND FEELING.

HE GAVE IT HUNGER.
OH, GOD... THE THINGS HE DID. THE THINGS I DID!

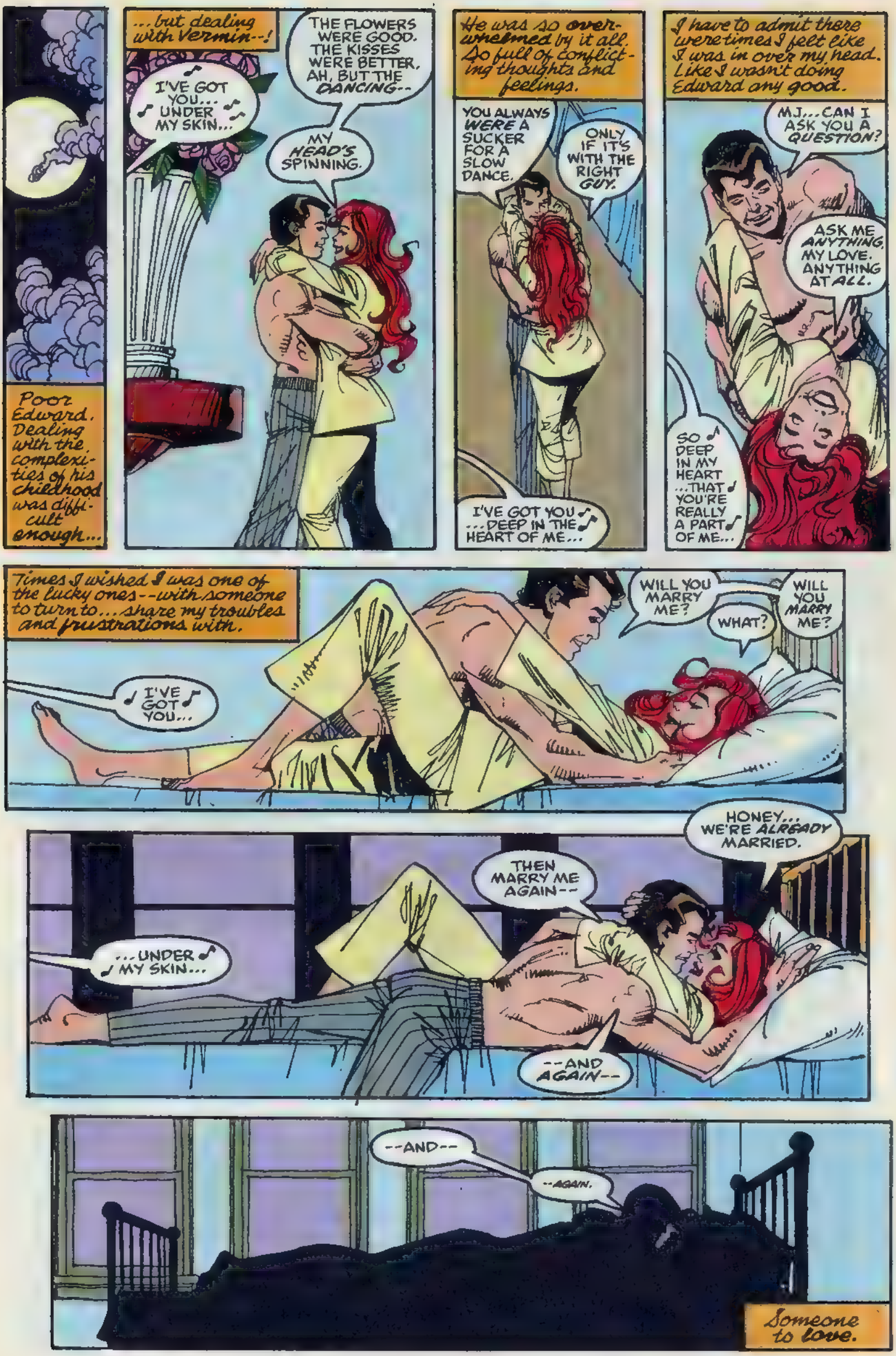
YOU WEREN'T RESPONSIBLE.
AM I THAT SICK, THAT TWISTED A PERSON... THAT I COULD DO SUCH THINGS?
IT WASN'T YOU. IT WAS A PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT.
IF YOU WANT TO BLAME SOMEONE FOR WHAT HAPPENED... BLAME YOUR FATHER. BLAME ZEMO. THEY'RE THE ONES WHO CREATED VERMIN.

I MUST BE A TERRIBLE PERSON... TO HAVE SUCH A THING INSIDE ME.
YOU'RE NOT THE CRIMINAL, EDWARD. YOU'RE THE VICTIM.
EVERY MAN... EVERY WOMAN... HAS A VERMIN INSIDE. YOU'VE JUST BEEN UNLUCKY ENOUGH--



--TO HAVE YOURS SET LOOSE IN THE WORLD.
GET SOME REST. I'LL BE IN MY OFFICE IF YOU NEED ANYTHING.

COME
OUT
COME
OUT
COME
OUT
COME OUT


Poor Edward. Dealing with the complexities of his childhood was difficult enough...
...but dealing with Vermin--!
I'VE GOT YOU... UNDER MY SKIN...
THE FLOWERS WERE GOOD. THE KISSES WERE BETTER, AH, BUT THE DANCING--
MY HEAD'S SPINNING.
He was so overwhelmed by it all. So full of conflicting thoughts and feelings.
YOU ALWAYS WERE A SUCKER FOR A SLOW DANCE.
ONLY IF IT'S WITH THE RIGHT GUY.
I'VE GOT YOU ...DEEP IN THE HEART OF ME...
I have to admit there were times I felt like I was in over my head. Like I wasn't doing Edward any good.
MJ... CAN I ASK YOU A QUESTION?
ASK ME ANYTHING, MY LOVE. ANYTHING AT ALL.
SO DEEP IN MY HEART ...THAT YOU'RE REALLY A PART OF ME...
Times I wished I was one of the lucky ones--with someone to turn to... share my troubles and frustrations with.
I'VE GOT YOU...
WILL YOU MARRY ME?
WHAT?
WILL YOU MARRY ME?
...UNDER MY SKIN...
THEN MARRY ME AGAIN--
HONEY... WE'RE ALREADY MARRIED.
--AND AGAIN--
--AND--
--AGAIN.
Someone to love.

That night was one of those times. I couldn't sleep. (Never really could when there was a full moon.) Just tossed and turned on the office couch...

...wallowing in self-pity. But I told myself I was being selfish. Your own struggles are nothing compared to Edward's.

I remembered what Mom always used to say "Be grateful for what you have.

"There's always someone less fortunate than you are."

COME NOW
COME NOW
COME NOW
COME NOW
COME NOW
COME NOW

My mother wasn't much of a philosopher...frankly, she wasn't much of a mother...but sometimes even she was right.

At that moment, Edward's struggles were far worse than mine.

NOW
NOW
NOW
NOW
NOW

Their Summoning was strong. Their need was desperate.

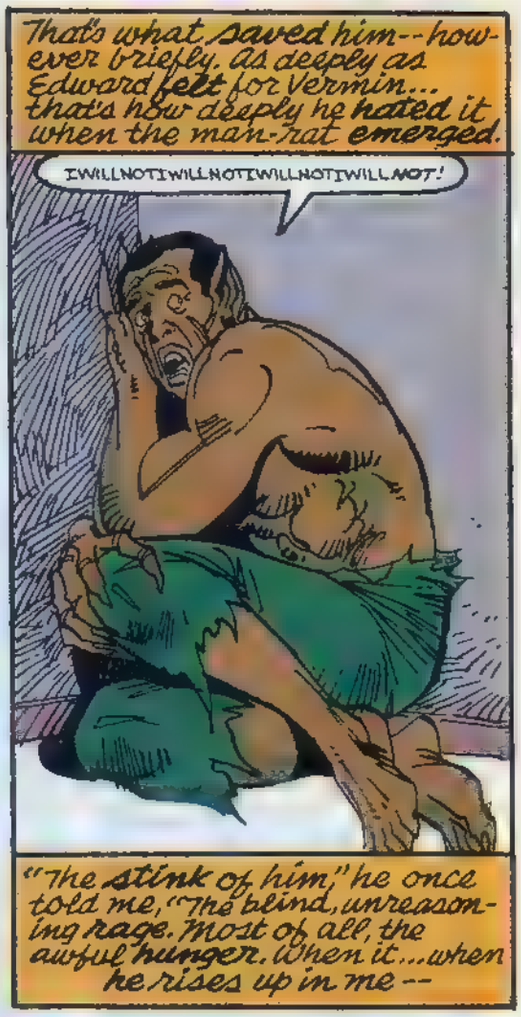
They called...from the depths of their pain.

How could he not answer?

NOW NOW
NOW
NOW
NOW
NOW

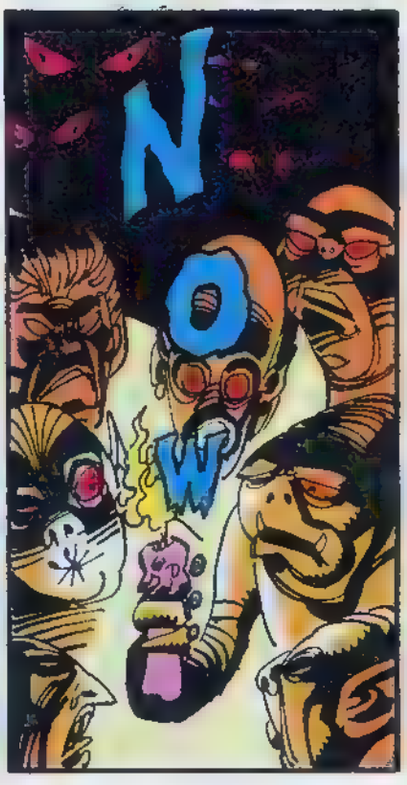
They were linked... heart-to-heart... mind-to-mind. But not to Edward...
NO!!
...to vermin

NOW!
NOW!
NOW!
NOW!
NOW!


That's what saved him -- however briefly. As deeply as Edward felt for Vermin... that's how deeply he hated it when the man-rat emerged.
IWILLNOTIWILLNOTIWILLNOTIWILLNOT!
"The stink of him," he once told me, "The blind, unreasoning rage. Most of all, the awful hunger. When it... when he rises up in me --

NOW!
NOW!
NOW!

"I'd rather be dead than be him. I swear to God I'd rather be dead!"
EDWARD --?!


NOW

And what got me up... brought me in to him just when he needed me?
WHAT HAPPENED?
A DREAM... I THINK. VERMIN WAS... I THINK IT WAS VERMIN... HE WAS PUSHING AT ME. THROUGH THE DREAM.
WELL, HE'S NEVER TRIED THAT BEFORE. THE CLOSER HE COMES TO EXTINCTION, THE TRICKIER HE GETS.
WHICH, BELIEVE IT OR NOT, IS A GOOD SIGN. HE KNOWS HIS TIME'S RUNNING OUT-- AND HE'S GETTING DESPERATE.
Could be that I was as linked to Edward...
SEE? IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S FADING--
... as those things down in the darkness were to Vermin.
--LIKE A DREAM.
Or maybe...
LIKE A DREAM.

...it was just the moon.
Whatever...there was something in the air. Disturbing. Seductive.
4:55
...MUN...
Electric.
HONEY--
--WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
GO BACK TO SLEEP, M.J.
WHAT'S WRONG?
NOTHING... EXACTLY. IT'S JUST THIS WHOLE CRAZY NIGHT-- PUMA, BLACK CROW, MY VISION UP ON THAT MOUNTAIN...* IT'S GOT MY MIND RACING. I KEEP WAKING UP.
THOUGHT I'D GET OUT AND DO A LITTLE WEB-SWINGING. THAT ALWAYS HELPS ME UNWIND.
BUT--
* ISSUES #191-193 --ROB.
BE BACK IN TIME FOR BREAKFAST. I PROMISE.
Spider-Man told me that he could feel it, too.

"It grabbed hold of me," he said. "Not that I could even say what 'it' was.
PETER--ARE YOU SURE THERE'S NOTHING WRONG?
"It was weird: I'd just gone through one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life. I needed time to let it all sink in.
HONEY, I'M FINE. REALLY.
I JUST WANNA GET SOME AIR, THAT'S ALL.
"To digest it.
DON'T WORRY. I'LL BRING US BACK SOME BAGELS AND THE PAPER. WE'LL HAVE A NICE, RELAXING MORNING TOGETHER.
MAKE ME ONE OF YOUR KILLER OMELETS?
YOU BET.
NOW GO BACK TO SLEEP.
LOVE YA.
YEAH--
--I LOVE YOU, TOO.
"So what was I doing going out at five in the morning..."

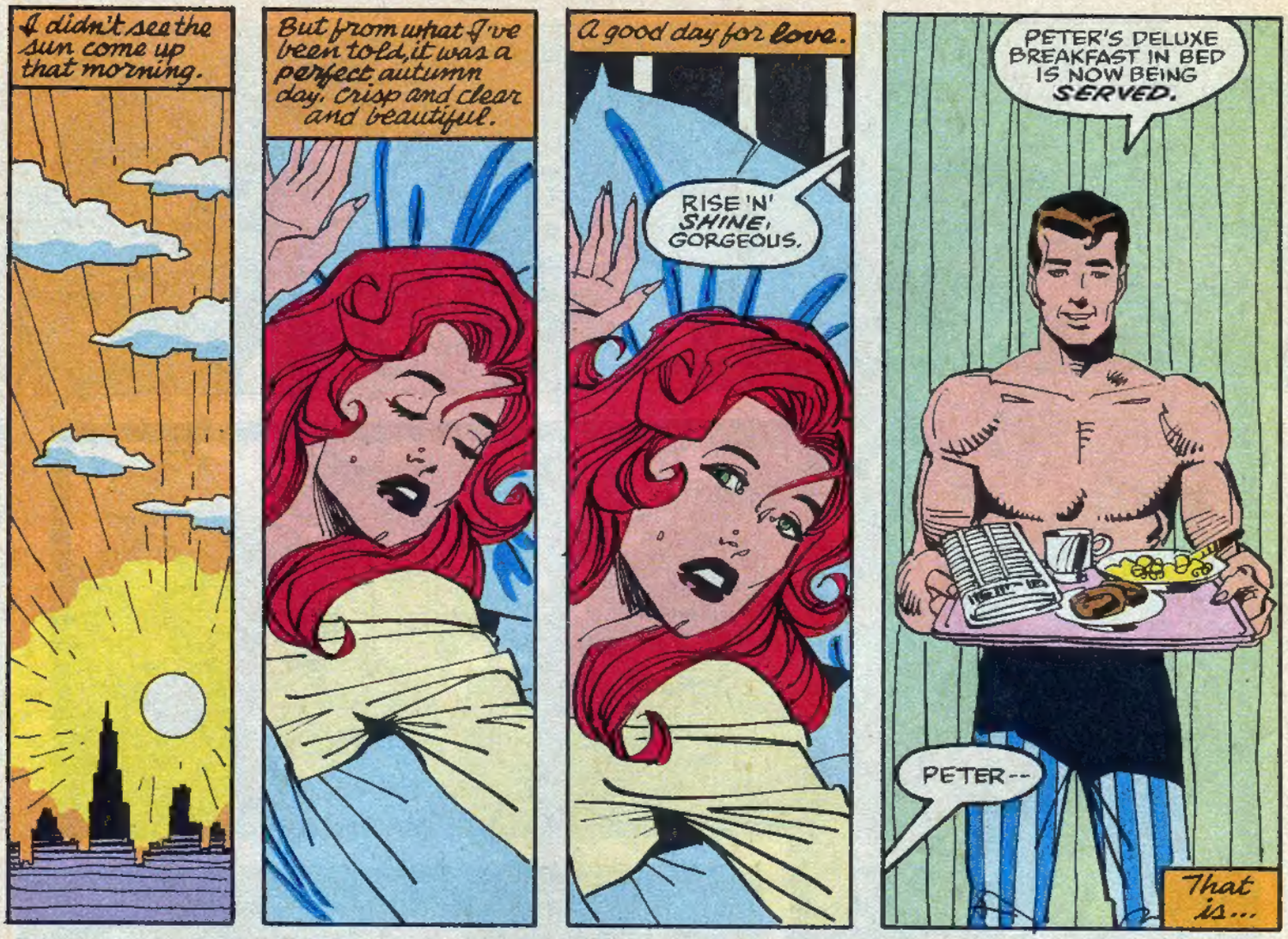
"... chasing shadows?"

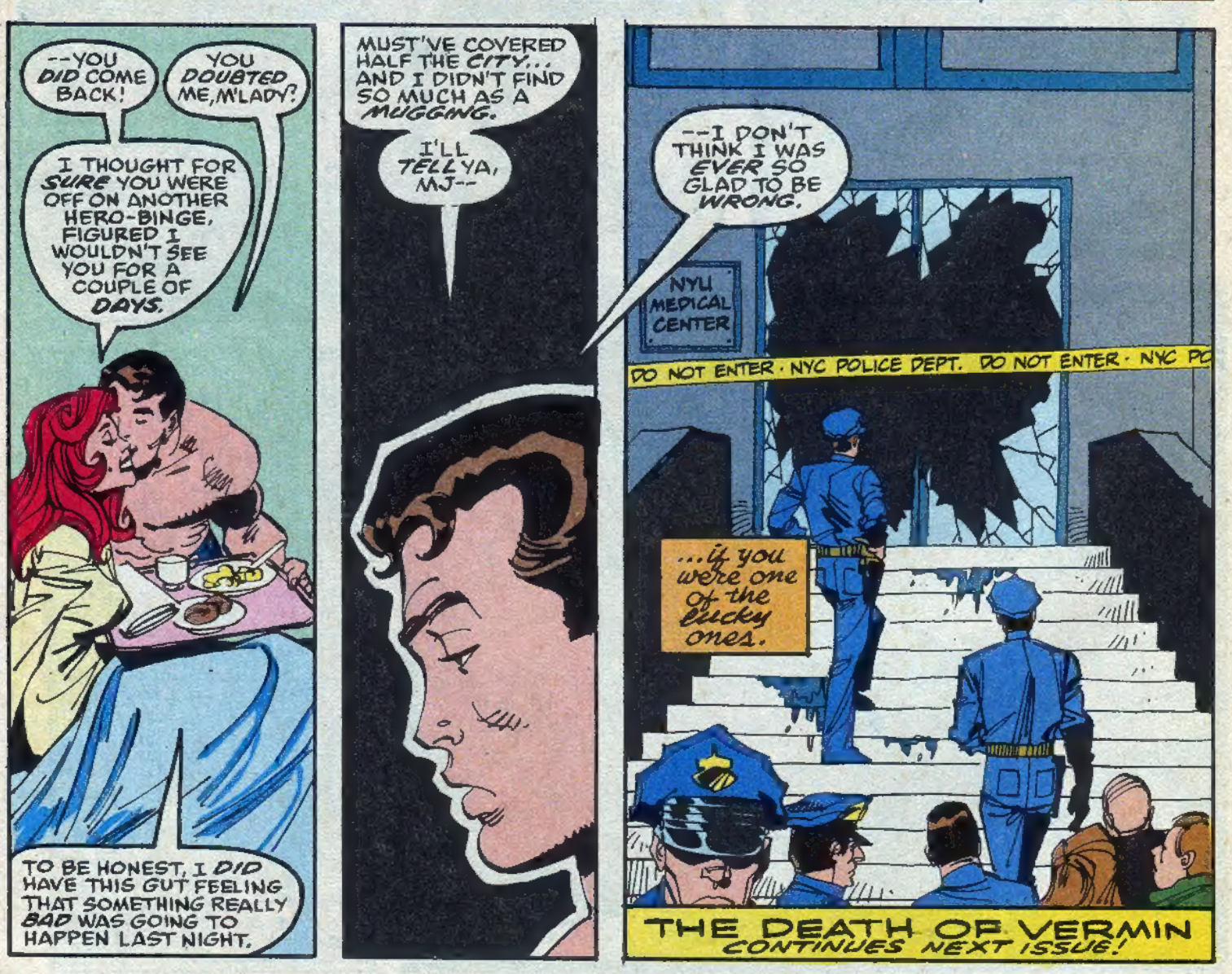
What was he doing?
What he always does. What he does best:
Saving the world. Or trying to.
I can just see him out there, the rain coming down in sheets again, the October wind cutting through him...
...swinging over the city in that skimpy costume (I wonder if it keeps him warm enough. I can't help it, I worry about people)...
...determined to fix the broken, help the helpless, find the lost, trounce the bad guys.
Y'know, if he ever decides to hang up his mask...
...that man would make one incredible therapist.

I must've drifted off a little before six: mind finally wore down; body finally caved in.
When I first heard the ruckus in the corridor, I didn't want to get up.
Leave me alone. Let somebody else take care of it for once.
But when I heard that scream...
DOCTORRRR!!
EDWARD?!
...I knew something was horribly wrong.
I rushed out into the hall, a hundred different disaster-scenarios unreeling in my head.
One good thing about being a chronic worrier, you can usually imagine just about any disaster before it actually happens.
But some things...
...simply defy imagination.
DOCTOR... HELP ME!... PLEASE!
HE SENT THEM!
HE SENT THEM!
I pride myself on my ability to respond to a crisis in the moment. Take care of things quickly and efficiently, without getting swept away on a wave of emotion. Been that way ever since I was a little girl.

I remember my kid sister once chopped part of her finger off in a kitchen fan...
HER
NNNNNNN
TOO.
...and, while dear old Mom blubbered hysterically, running around the apartment like a headless chicken; I packed Norma's finger on ice...
NOOOO.
...and got her off to the hospital.
They saved the finger. And it was only later, when we got back home, that I allowed myself to really feel what had happened. To really cry.
But when those... things grabbed me... when they swarmed over me ...I just couldn't control myself.
I reacted like my mother: weak and afraid. Helpless. Hysterical.
I started to scream.
And scream.

KRA-
KOOM!
and scream.


I didn't see the sun come up that morning.
But from what I've been told, it was a perfect autumn day. Crisp and clear and beautiful.
A good day for love.
RISE 'N' SHINE, GORGEOUS.
PETER'S DELUXE BREAKFAST IN BED IS NOW BEING SERVED.
PETER--
That is...


--YOU DID COME BACK!
YOU DOUBTED ME, M'LADY?
I THOUGHT FOR SURE YOU WERE OFF ON ANOTHER HERO-BINGE, FIGURED I WOULDN'T SEE YOU FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS.
TO BE HONEST, I DID HAVE THIS GUT FEELING THAT SOMETHING REALLY BAD WAS GOING TO HAPPEN LAST NIGHT.
MUST'VE COVERED HALF THE CITY... AND I DIDN'T FIND SO MUCH AS A MUGGING.
I'LL TELL YA, MJ--
--I DON'T THINK I WAS EVER SO GLAD TO BE WRONG.
NYU MEDICAL CENTER
DO NOT ENTER · NYC POLICE DEPT. DO NOT ENTER · NYC PO
...if you were one of the lucky ones.
THE DEATH OF VERMIN
CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE!

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAIL

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
387 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10016

ROB TOKAR
EDITOR
DAN CUDDY
ASSISTANT EDITOR
DANNY FINGEROTH
GROUP EDITOR

Attention correspondents: All letters considered for publication must include your name and address, though we will withhold that information upon request.

Dear Spectacular Spider-Mail,

I've just read issue #186 and I loved it! I'm pulling my hair out waiting for the next issue. I've collected all the Spider-Man titles for about 4 years now and I've always loved Aunt May. Reading this issue about Aunt May reminded me of a previous issue. I searched my collection and found issue #155 in which you guys announced that Aunt May had 6 months to live. Did you guys forget, or are you planning something big to happen to her in the thirtieth anniversary of Spidey?

So until Aunt May has fallen and she can't get up, make mine Marvel!

Daniel Chisholm
9411 Glenbrook Dr.
Richmond, B.C.
Canada V7A 1X9

Forget? We never forget, oh nearly-bald one. But in #155 it was her beau Nathan who had six months to live--not May.

Dear Spider People,

I just got done reading issue #186 and in it Mary Jane was talking about not having a baby but saying to Aunt May that they will one day. Why would you put something like that in there? If they did have a baby, could he or she inherit the powers and become a mutant super hero or a villain?

Jeff Shackelford
Greenville, SC

Sure, he or she might inherit Spidey's powers, Jeff. But considering that a mutant is a being with characteristics possessed by neither parent, it wouldn't be a mutant, now would it?

Dear Web-Slingers,

As a long time SPIDER-MAN reader I am somewhat saddened to hear about the Vulture's impending doom. Spidey's first real super powered enemy is finally ready to "make peace" with old web-head. I am very excited about this storyline. However, I must point one thing out. On page 4 of issue #186, the Vulture is swooping down to kill Aunt May because of "unfinished business" with her and he calls off his attack when Mary Jane approaches.

Vulture had a run-in with M.J. when she witnessed him commit murder way back in AMAZING SPIDEY #127-128. Therefore he should have been just as anxious to kill M.J., don't you think?

J.D. Maddox
192 Industrial Park Drive
Lawrenceville, GA 30245

As you no doubt know Vulch wasn't going to kill May, he was going to ask her forgiveness. As for MJ, who's to say he even recognized her?

Yo, Spider-Mail!

Wow! Wow! Simply amazing! This is what I have to say about SPECTAC-ULAR #186. "Funeral Arrangements" part one literally blew me out of my seat! I gotta admit it, when I started to collect comics about a year ago, SPECTACULAR was at the bottom of my pile. But, since the totally majestic, magnificent, incomparable J.M. DeMatteis came to this title, I found SPECTACULAR to be at the top of my pile. I loved his Scarlet Redemption story in MOON KNIGHT, and I simply adored KRAVEN'S LAST HUNT. He's absolutely my favorite writer.

Sal Buscema's art is simply the perfect match for DeMatteis's writing style. Whatever you do guys, do not let this team, which will soon be one of the classic teams, leave this title.

Now on to "Funeral Arrangements." What a perfect name! So eerie. Makes you want to buy it just from hearing the name! What a cliffhanger! The death of Aunt May? Would Marvel eliminate one of the most important people in Peter's life? Let me just tell you this. If Aunt May dies, Peter will lose his sanity. And you know how Peter gets when he gets angry. Anyway, thank you from the bottom of my ever-beating heart for making the best of the Spidey titles a simple pleasure to read.

Sean Hakim
1226 Mulmur Court
Pickering, Ontario
Canada

Glad you enjoyed it, Sean. Hard to believe, but J.M. and Sal just keep gettin' better with each issue, so don't' miss the rest of this saga!

Dear Danny,

I'm breathless. SPEC. SPIDER-MAN, the best comic on the market today, just keeps getting better. I read issue #186 just now and there is so much to comment on.

Tension. Like I said, I was breathless as I read it, turning the pages in a frenzy (but then having to go back and savor the artwork). J.M. continues to increase the tension of the Goblin plotline (which is building up to rival the intensity of the Ned Leeds/Hobgoblin unmasking a few years back) while introducing a totally new plotline involving one of my favorite Spidey villains, the Vulture. Adrian Toomes is a character who has been very hit and miss over the years, being handled both excellently and terribly. When done right, though, he's hot! J.M. chooses the best of the past Vulture storylines (AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #240-241) as the basis for this interpretation of the character, and as with Kraven and the Goblin before, he breathes new life into villains who were in danger of becoming tiring. I am concerned however that this storyline may end in the Vulture's death (particularly, as I understand, the death of Harry/Goblin is also in the cards). Although the death of Kraven was justified, I don't want to see J.M. revitalize these classic characters just to kill them off. Still, by giving the Vulture only a short time to live, J.M. has increased the potential of the character, making him more desperate and savage (and therefore dangerous) than ever before. No longer is he a joke villain who can easily be defeated--now he's terrifying!

Meanwhile, on the subject of breathing new life into old characters, enter May Parker. For years, I've been fed up with Aunt May, thinking her stale and tired. Even the old heart problem dried up so the possibility of a swift shock ending was gone. In one issue, J.M. has changed my opinion of the old coot considerably, with the best characterization of Pete's Aunt in many years. I feel J.M. may be moving towards a revelation concerning Mrs. Parker--could she finally have put two and two together to come up with a red and blue spider? "We do what we have to...to survive." Very profound.

Sal Buscema is currently doing the best Spider-Man since...oh, I'd say only John Romita, Jr. would come close. Sal's Spidey has become the definitive, basically, his Spidey compares very favorably to Ditko and Romita, and, heck (no offense to Sal) he's been around for a looong time! Most fans today are snapping up the latest hot work from artist X or Y, but what do these artists really have to offer? A brief flash in the pan who believes that excessive detail is a kind of cover for lack of storytelling ability.

The cover to #186 was especially good. As for the interior work--this is Spidey and the Vulture--look at the rooftops, chimneys, telegraph poles, etc. Hey, these guys are fighting in a scene I can recognize...rather than just another bunch of squareblock buildings. Thanks, guys, for bringing back the Spider-Man I love, my favorite comic book character, my hero. As Spidey approaches his 30th year, you are doing him justice once more.

Rol Hirst
England

Thanks, Rol. But I'd refrain from calling Aunt May an old coot. She might just decide to pay you a housecall. Then we'll see who's tired and who's tough! And don't be so sure about the death for the Vulture or the Goblin. Don't be unsure, either, but just don't be sure.

NEXT ISSUE: The *Death of Vermin* continues...but will Vermin make Spidey and Dr. Kafka precede him?